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RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 0880
RUEHLI/AMEMBASSY LISBON 0981
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 DILI 000362

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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT RAMOS HORTA DESCENDS ON OPPOSITION TERRITORY TO
WIN CONSTITUENTS

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CLASSIFIED BY: Hans Klemm, Ambassador, US Embassy Dili, STATE.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (SBU) Summary. On a November 6 - 8 trip, President Jose Ramos Horta traveled into FRETILIN territory to defend the Alliance for a Parliamentary Majority (AMP) government, promote his anti-poverty program, and counter the opposition FRETILIN party's criticisms of against his government. He praised Timor-Leste's foreign friends for extending goodwill and aid as the country seeks to restore security, economic and social progress and overcome political violence and domestic divisions. End summary.

12. (SBU) In a move to mobilize his populist appeal, President Jose Ramos Horta traveled on November 6 - 8 to Los Palos, Baucau, Vemasse and nearby subdistricts for a series of direct dialogues with the overwhelmingly pro-FRETILIN population in those cities. In August, these areas were the scenes of violence following the announcement of the new AMP coalition government. Poloff joined the President's traveling party in Baucau, along with the Portuguese Ambassador and the Malaysian Poloff. Aides to the President described the trip as a "show of courage" meant to win over groups of people who have felt disenfranchised by the FRETILIN defeat in the June 30 parliamentary elections. Since last August, FRETILIN has repeatedly criticized the President's "unwillingness to travel to districts of FRETILIN support to explain his reasons for forming a new government" excluding the party from power. These accusations have also hinted at cowardice by the President for favoring frequent trips abroad over travel within Timor-Leste. November 5 - 8, Ramos Horta tackled the opposition on its own turf while reaching out to new constituents. He also used the occasion to meet with Armed Forces of Timor-Leste (F-FDTL) troops and members of the National Police (PNTL), praising the latter in Baucau for its work and noting that "at one time, the (U.S.) Department of State noted your poor human rights record. You are doing great work today, and I remind you above all things to always observe human rights."

Pressing the flesh and feeling their pain

13. (U) During lengthy, town-hall style meetings with hundreds of citizens in different locations, the President offered the opportunity for citizens to ask him questions directly. Turnout was high. In Baucau the crowds were largely welcoming, although some questions were hostile. He addressed all questions and at the end of each event the audiences seemed very receptive and positive, and seemed somewhat surprised that the President ventured into their districts to address their concerns. Ramos Horta's main messages were the following:

-- Peace: The nation cannot afford itself to be divided by ideologies - we are all Timorese.

-- The legality of the AMP-led government: If the AMP-led government is illegal and unconstitutional, as FRETILIN has charged, the question should be brought before a court of law. If the courts find that the government is illegal, it will resign and the President would apologize to the people.

-- Anti-Poverty Efforts: During its five years in power, the FRETILIN government failed to improve the lot of the people and to secure the future. The AMP government is committed to establishing an anti-poverty program to move the country ahead, but FRETILIN has threatened to derail it in the National Parliament. Timor-Leste's resources are many, and its global friendships also indicate the country is not alone.

-- Old versus New: FRETILIN is the historical basis of the nation, and Ramos Horta stressed his role as a founding party member. However, mistakes were made over the years. Differences in outlook emerged between those FRETILIN leaders who went into exile in U.S. Mozambique, Angola, Europe, and those such as Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao who continued the struggle in Timor-Leste. Ramos-Horta stressed that Xanana was not a "traitor" as recently alleged by FRETILIN, but rather a warrior who fought for national independence while others were in exile. He attempted to de-mystify former FRETILIN Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri as a man who is a vocal critic of the current government in spite of his own unimpressive five years in office

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Ramos Horta Criticizes "Anti-Foreigner Propaganda"; Highlights International Friendships

14. (U) At each stop, Ramos Horta introduced the members of the diplomatic corps as representatives of the goodwill enjoyed by Timor-Leste around the world. He complained that some politicians and newspapers, such as the Timor Post, have been guilty of spreading anti-foreigner propaganda in spite of the fact that Malaysia, Australia, the U.S., Portugal, and others, have offered us assistance. He mentioned Portugal's deep historical friendship with Timor-Leste; Malaysia's support, which strengthens the country's ties to ASEAN; Indonesia's new post-Suharto democracy, which reflects a different country than the one which occupied them; and Australia's unwavering friendship, as exemplified through the great work of the International Stabilization Force (ISF) "which has also been victimized by false propaganda."

15. (C) On U.S.-Timor-Leste relations, Ramos Horta consistently expressed his support and friendship for the U.S. in both his public and private remarks. In his speeches, he described the U.S. as unfairly criticized for having allegedly condoned Indonesia's 1975 invasion at the height of the Cold War. He said that it was time to see the U.S. as "our friend, the world's only superpower which made it possible for us to attain our independence." In private conversations with Poloff, he blamed the FRETILIN leadership for almost inviting an Indonesian invasion in 1975 by initiating a civil war and using Marxist-Leninist slogans, which he described as "stupid and senseless." This Marxist rhetoric, he said, had led to fears

that an Indonesian invasion was justified in order to prevent the emergence of "another Cuba" in Southeast Asia.

What the President is Thinking

¶6. (C) In conversation with Poloff, the President shared his thoughts on current issues. He said he was glad to talk to the people directly in order to challenge FRETILIN's "divisive rhetoric" and explain his plans to enhance their standard of living. He described all key political players as his old friends or acquaintances, going back many years before independence from Portugal. Comparing Xanana and Alkatiri, said the former was "arrogant, but he likes to pretend to be humble, unlike Alkatiri, who doesn't even pretend to be anything but arrogant." Nevertheless, his admiration for Xanana was clear, especially his legacy as a fighter for independence. Ramos Horta described "the secret to knowing Alkatiri" as understanding his ethnic Yemeni roots, which are different from those of most Timorese, and his years of exile in Africa. Ramos Horta noted that if Yemenis are disliked in Indonesia by Javanese Muslims, "imagine in a Catholic country." He also noted Alkatiri's dour personality, which is different from the average Timorese. "The population here likes to smile and he never does, not even for pretense."

¶7. (C) On the August crisis, Ramos Horta said he had considered appointing Alkatiri as Prime Minister, but Xanana advised him against it. Ramos Horta believes that Alkatiri would have used his appointment to strengthen his power and erode any one else's. He also noted that although it cannot be proven, Alkatiri "was certainly behind the violence," and said that many children were found to have from 5 to 50 USD in their pockets to throw rocks at vehicles and burn down homes and buildings, including the Customs building in Dili. He noted "that money came from somewhere, and I am sure it was from Alkatiri and FRETILIN although they consistently deny it." He further noted Alkatiri does not have the best interests of Timor-Leste at heart as he claims, but has proven to be a manipulator through violence" at the expense of the country's security.

¶8. (C) On FRETILIN, Ramos Horta described the party as "in transition," and observed that the top party leadership was divided, as demonstrated during the last party summit October 25 - 28, which many top leaders, including former Minister of

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Public Administration Ana Pessoa, failed to attend. Ramos Horta said he would promote his own agenda rather than simply react to FRETILIN criticisms.

Conclusion: JRH Back In The Fray

¶10. (SBU) President Ramos Horta has been criticized for traveling frequently overseas while neglecting to reach out to those in Timor-Leste's hinterlands. He began to challenge those criticisms when he visited the FRETILIN stronghold of Viqueque on October 24, continued this outreach with his November 6 - 8 trip to the centers of FRETILIN support, where he publicly challenged the opposition's philosophy, blaming Alkatiri directly for fomenting division, and contrasting FRETILIN's approach with his own vision for the country. In the meantime, FRETILIN critiqued the President's anti-poverty proposals at the National Parliament and challenged its legality and constitutionality in the Court of Appeals on November 8.
KLEMM